

HISTORY OF BASEBALL

Wes Davis

Dr. Dixon

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Jim Lokaiser has been involved in local baseball for more than forty-five years. His first job was equipment manager for the Yankee organization in 1946-47. A year later he became office boy for the Detroit Tigers. Mr. Lokaiser started covering the Pirate organization in 1960. He covered major league baseball and especially the Pirates until 1975. After World War II, American Legion Baseball became big. Mr. Lokaiser played in this league and has now been a commissioner for the Legion for over thirty years. He moonlights as a sportscaster on the radio. He was asked to recount some of interesting elements of the history of Western Pennsylvania baseball.

That's probably the primary thing we'll want to talk about here was that Pullman Park was on the west side of Butler is still in use. It's a major league proportioned ballpark, dead center field 424, left field line 352, and right field about 350. It's still being used by legion, sandlot, and high school baseball.

Pullman Park was constructed in 1933. It then opened officially in 1934. That's when minor league baseball started in Butler. When the Cleveland Indians were the first franchise in the old Penn State League. Then the Yankee's took over the following year and had it right up through World War II. During World War II, organized baseball was shut down at the minor league level. It was reinstated back in 1946.

Pullman Park was built by the people who owned Pullman Standard Rail manufacturing company back then. It was built on top of an old cinder pile. They levelled off the cinder pile and they just put dirt on top of that. The ironic part about that is the field is probably the best drained field in the whole Western Pennsylvania area. It can rain in the morning and you can play ball in the afternoon. It drains quite well.

I do want to back up and bring one other thing up about the local level and I think it is something that we failed to mention here about sandlot baseball versus professional baseball. I forgot to mention and I talked to you before about this. In the Twenties and Thirties, especially in areas like Petrolia Valley of Butler County, where you had a lot of industry going up there, baseball was the big thing. The companies back then used to hire their employees based on their athletic abilities. They would actually recruit workers and ball players out of maybe West Virginia or Ohio and move them in, move their family in, because they could play baseball.

The teams were very competitive back then. They would travel all over the eastern seaboard as far west as Detroit and Chicago to compete on a national level. Petrolia Valley was a hot bed for baseball. A lot of the old timers who are now retired, owe their jobs to their athletic abilities. That's true in places like Weirton West

irginia, in the Weirton Steel Works, and up in Petrolia Valley.

Who was the most colorful person you ever got to interview? The most fun to talk to?

Well, most colorful good and bad. Steve Vlass without a doubt is. Steve does color for Pittsburgh right now. He is absolutely one of the funniest guys. He's very colorful, the locker room clown. Conversely, there where guys like Bob Roberts and Doc Ellis. Players like this where just the opposite. Doc Ellis was a trouble maker, a dope user. He threw a no hit ball game when he was high on dope.

One thing I do want to add that would be a note of interest. Back whenever the Yankees were here at Pullman Park and playing in the Middle Atlantic league, one of the taboos was swimming. Ball players were not allowed to swim. Back then, they thought that swimming was harmful, it softened the muscles. It was no good for ball players, especially pitchers. Back then, if you played night games at Pullman Park for the Yankees, your days were free. The players used to sneak away and go to what then was called Stoaton's Beach which was then later known as Rock Falls Park which is just below Slippery Rock. That was a big recreation area with that big swimming pool and then of course people used to lay on the rocks in the creek area. But that's where the ball players used to sneak to and hang out quite a bit. Up at that time it was called Stoaton's

each.

If they got caught, they were fined. And of course you realize a ball player back then was making one hundred fifty or two hundred dollars a month. Plus a couple dollars a day meal money. So that wasn't an awful amount of money. If they were fined ten or fifteen dollars, that was a lot of money. As for the history in the county is concerned, Old Stoaton's Beach as it was called then was a sort of hangout for the ball players then during the daylight hours, then they would come home and play ball at night.